

**Testimony of Ann Gardner
Middletown, CT
in Support of HB 6558**

Thank you for the opportunity to address a pressing problem to my husband and I and probably to all the senior citizen tenants I know – repeated drastic and excessive rent increases.

My husband and I have been long time residents at the Stonegate Apartments in Middletown, Connecticut. Of the two buildings on the property, we have lived in the one dedicated to senior citizens, 55 years and older. For much of our time here we lived a modest but pleasant life among people with similar concerns, outlook and community. We knew all, or nearly all, the tenants of the 80 or more apartments in the building. The landlord fostered a sense of community with seasonal parties and decorations. And given that most of us here were on a fixed income, and had decided to spend our retirements here, the landlord respected our circumstances and when he increased the rent (which he often did not), they were modest increases on the order of \$10 a month.

All of that changed when ownership of the building changed and Up Realty began managing the property. In one of its first actions, Up Realty decided to destroy the community here by issuing notices to over 20 families here to vacate their premises. This was done during a time that we seniors were facing a lethal disease that was especially fatal to us. I don't know what the motives of this company was but it spread fear of losing our homes throughout this building. And this was on top of the fear we had of the disease. Although Senator Lesser and Representative Williams came to assure us of our right to stay as long as we paid, nothing was ever the same again. In the end, the fear drove most if not all of those 20 or more families away. And Up Realty began making life unbearable here, possibly to drive us seniors out. The superintendent who lived in this building was let go. Noise and filth and confusion ran through this place as groups of workmen worked to remodel the apartments that they took from the senior citizens who had long lived here. The construction garbage was left throughout the yards and parking lot and dumpsters took up what used to be parking space. This lasted nearly a year. After that, services that we came to expect were cut. Snow removal was days late. One year we were repeatedly told that the last snowstorm was a problem but soon Up Realty would engaged a professional snow removal company to clean up the property. But that never happened and repeated snowfalls left us stuck indoors with drifts of snow in the parking lots. This was a particular problem given that all garbage had to be taken to the dumpsters in the parking lot. And at least 2 seniors fell on the frozen parking lots just trying to keep their apartments hygienic.

Soon repairs took longer and longer to get done. Phone calls would go unanswered at Up Realty's office, and it became harder and harder to reach them. Landscaping stopped. Instead, Up realty chopped down trees and shrubs and allowed weeds to grow. Security was neglected, especially when the contractors propped doors open for their ease of access and personal storage units were broken into and mail packages were stolen.

All this had to be contended with by my husband and I, both of whom have serious medical conditions requiring expensive medicine taken regularly. And then Up Realty began their practice of excessive rent increases. After some tenants received exorbitant rent notices, and negotiated them down, we were still faced with a 10% rent increase. And then next year, last year, we faced another 10+% rent increase. I am told that senior tenants should face, by law, only a “fair and equitable” rent increase. How can annual increases of 10% be “fair and equitable”? Thankfully we received a 7% increase in social security last year. But that was the first substantial increase in 40 years. And it wasn't even as much as Up Realty wants to increase our rent every year. We have not gotten this years notice, but who knows,

they may ask for more.

It is for this reason, lower service, declining upkeep, constant moving of tenants who cannot afford the rent increases, that a cap must be instituted. But I am afraid the Consumer Price Index + 4%” is far too high to keep up here, which is what the Legislature says it wants for senior tenants. Our medical bills keep rising, other costs mount and while we try to live frugally, we must keep pace with the increasing gouging by our landlord.

We therefore earnestly ask that this bill be modified to cap the rent at a much lower rate, like the 2.5% the bill originally had. We constantly hear how our leaders want to stop the departure of seniors and young people from the state, but how can that be done unless there is some stability and restraint in their housing costs?